

ALUMINUM SIOUX CAMPS

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ABSTRACT

THE PHENOMENA OF THE ALUMINUM “SIOUX CAMP”

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Through painted compositions, the objective of this thesis is to provide an analysis of ethnicity, gender, race and social-domestic practices within a multitude of varying metaphorical signifiers embedded in the content, composition, schemes of color, execution of line and overall subject matter.

To be more specific, the thesis exhibit consists of compositions on three painted, wooden structures that hang horizontally on an identified wall space in a gallery in the Cherokee Central School Performing Arts Center. The wooden structures vary in size from 5'x7' to 6'x9'. The color execution of the compositions are delivered in the mediums of acrylic and enamel with a focus on regional class/cultural practices in the aspect of domestic social living arrangements. Pinpointing this identification within the compositions is the common element of the regional icon of the singlewide mobile home.

Additionally, there are underlying icons of “Native ethnicity” present within the images. It is the intent for these icons to exist covertly within the composition; creating an establishment of image unencumbered by preconceived notions and icons that so commonly swirl around Native art.

The Works Cited page highlights some of artistic influences that have driven the stylistic establishments of these particular compositions. A few of the influences cited in this thesis include, Fritz Scholder, Roy Lichtenstein, and Alex Katz.

INTRODUCTION

It is a firm belief that the (Eastern Band of Cherokee) along with other Indigenous cultures, actively executes certain social-domestic practices that are no longer necessitous in this modern age. Even though the primary focus throughout this analysis will be on the Native people of North America, there is strong evidence that this practice may be prevalent in other cultures and social classes nationally as well.

Through documented observations, It appears that there is a subconscious predilection amongst identified demographics to cluster domestic dwellings closely together in cul-de-sac arrangements with no clear motivator.

With awkward, constrained domestic arrangements, there is an elicitation of a yearning by the demographic identified, for an achievement of a rural and domestic Utopian environment.

TENSION AS ABSTRACTION AND EXPRESSION OF UNITY

In the very deepest memory recesses, reaching as far back as the impressionable early years as a young child, there have been distinct recollections for me, of a fascination with the Tee Pees of the Plains Indian tribes. At the very foundation of this sense of captivation lay an immersion in a body of artwork that was ever-present, albeit through reproductions, within the modern home.

My mother had been an avid collector of books. This was especially true in regard to the “Old West” fiction novels. Most crystalline are the memories that lead back to the artwork that enveloped the covers of the expansive collection of Louis L’Amour novels she possessed. The artwork of Carl Hantman seemed to be the most prevalent visions on the covers of the novels. Hantman was capturing a look and feel of the period detailed in the tales spun by the author L’Amour. There was a kind of stillness and coolness to his works that seemed to deliver an emotive effect in a covert manner sans unnecessary embellishments.



Figure 1. Carl Hantman, *Moonlight Medicine*, Painting.

In addition to this collection of literature was my mother's diminutive but impactful collection of art books by the 19th century American Realist painter George Catlin. I perused page after page of these books searching for the indigenous imagery that captivated my interest of compositional arrangement and uniqueness of form. Being Eastern Band Cherokee as well as being raised on the Qualla Indian Boundary of Cherokee in Western North Carolina, I saw no real novelty in the specific portraiture and figurative compositions by Catlin of the Natives within these novels and art books which seemed to wallow in redundancy. The romanticism and sensationalism of the portraiture delivered by Catlin of the indigenous people was no doubt partly manifested by his fascination of a people he feared would become extinct in years to come (George Catlin). In fact, it was quite evident very early on that there were some romantic executions emanating from these images of the Natives in these books by these non-Native artists solely for the sake of exploitation. This was in lieu of pure journalistic execution of the culture as was communicated. Critics have long questioned the accuracy of Catlin's interactions with the Indigenous peoples of North America. Contemporary Native American Artist Fritz Scholder may have best summed up the attitude towards the Native American as art subject in a statement he made in 1979 during an interview: "The American Indian has been a loaded subject from the moment he was discovered; from the very beginning, the non-Indian has had preconceived ideas about the noble savage" (Scholder 2).

The line between realism and sensationalism, within these images, in the books by Catlin may have been and are still very much open to debate. However,

the impact of these books in my creative interests was not in the portraiture of the Indigenous people but in the recurring images that were delivered by Catlin in regards to the domestic camps of the various Plains tribes. In George Catlin's painting, "Comanche Village", you see the artist's focus on the structural form of the nomadic camps in a way that is distinct from his indigenous portraiture.



Figure 2. George Catlin, *Comanche Village*, 1835. Painting

The formal elements in the structural arrangement of the nomadic camps were of great intrigue. Emanating from the images of these camps was a great sense of constraint of movement. From the verticality of the tapered, conical shapes grew a sense of tension as they communicated a need to erupt from the infinitely wide, flat plain of earth that intersected them. In some images, the upright forms seemed enormous in size, as if there were monuments to a higher power. In reality, these dwellings were really only about 15-20 feet in height on average, hardly what one would call massive (White 112). But, the genius in their

design, with the tapering angle and verticality, whether for style or practicality, gave them the sense of monumental proportion.

The manner in which the Plains camps were recorded or portrayed by various artists in the mediums of paint and photography also made them exude a greater sense of volume and space. It is quite understandable how this could be a feature of an artist's vision as one looks deeply at the actual arrangement of the forms by the Indigenous peoples in relation to one another within the overall composition of the camp. Through this arrangement, one sees that juxtaposition begins to occur. The tight, constrained clustering and positioning within these massive tracts of space seems oddly contradictory. The forms exude tension and awkward constraint amongst one another in a seemingly unnecessary arrangement of close-fit relationship. The footprint of the camp begins to feel busy and cluttered. Taking into consideration all of the unlimited space around them, one would think that the inhabitants of the teepees would choose to deliver a slight measure of acceptable distance amongst one another in their co-habitation. It would seem quite possible that the attempts at a sense of community that was no doubt being achieved could still yet be established even with a larger sense of spacing between the forms. But, time and time again a sense of forced arrangement amongst the structures in the camps is evident in the imagery. Even with this compression of space within the camps from a formal perspective, the arrangements provide the perfect artistic composition to their surroundings, creating a forced sense of unity through imbalance in some strange juxtaposition.

As my development and maturity as an artist progressed, there were further considerations to these forms on varying, ascending layers. Specifically, I studied the Teepees of the Plains tribes with a higher concentration in regards to the compositional arrangements of abstract elements like the plains, lines, and shapes and how they fit or did not fit in the larger frame of their surroundings. As I explored the imagery further through photographs, I took note that certain photographers like William Soule were taking great interest not only in the portraiture of the American Indian but also in the camps they were living in as well.



Figure 3. William Soule, *Arapahoe Camp*. 1870. Photograph

Specifically, there was an interest in the overall relationship of these forms against the natural surroundings that enveloped them. In these images, the forms seem to form an abstract replication of certain components of their surroundings. The teepee forms were echoed in the mountain peaks that stood far behind them

in the distance, the plains of the foreground were repeated in the river plain further behind them and the valley line even further still. A heightened feeling of rhythms seemed to exude within the images. Symmetry and asymmetry seemed to jockey with one another in these compositions with no clear advantage being established. Within this realm of photographic realism, I began to see patterns, which has direct correlations to greater senses of abstraction. One could find these components flourishing within the images in accordance to where the eye focused. As an epiphany developed, the endeavor now became to try to seek out more and more of these images. The search would entail an investigation into representations in several mediums, and an even deeper search of these camps by the varying tribes that erected them. There were ample amounts of data and images that highlighted the Northern Plains tribes like the Sioux Confederacies, the Crow, Arapahoe, Kiowa and Blackfeet. The majority of the Plains tribes were nomadic, chasing the migrations of the animals that sustained them (White 143). The teepees that these tribes lived in were the products of efficient engineering by the tribes as they followed these migration paths. The structures were pre-fabricated dwellings made from bison skins and wooden poles that could be erected and broken back down. This afforded ease of transportation from place to place. The structures were surprisingly effective in their durability, and the structures possessed an amazing ability to retain heat in winter, provide cool in summer, and protect from winds and torrential rains. Through the depth of the research it would become evident that this clustering and congestive

arrangement was intentional and very appropriate for the tribes to ensure better unity, communication and a greater sense of security within the camps.

It would be many years later that I would again make considerations within my creative visions in regard to the forms of the Plains Indian camps. The concept of a visionary response to these forms always intrigued me but ultimately was placed in a lower stage of priority in my artistic executions. It would not be until critical decisions were made in my artistic direction that I would again envision a series that would somehow tie these forms to something more contemporary and relevant to the times. As a Native artist there was still a high level of interest in the subject of the Native American, and the intent was to somehow explore options for a means to deliver artistic visions that intelligently expressed my cultural identity. In addition to that statement, it would be prudent to add that there was also an intention to compose the images I created in a manner that was culturally more covert. The overarching objective within this series of works was to provide commentary that could potentially be construed as both Native and non-Native, emanating cues that could be attached as regional and or, national. As I combed the inner recesses of my mind I began the exercise of searching for an angle to best execute my visions as an artist. It was only after much research and artistic trial and error that a subject was identified that was not only quite common in my culture but one that was as visually arresting as the forms I was so enamored with as a child. The image that I would base my thesis series around would be the singlewide trailer and in addition, the manner in

which the people of my community organize them within the specific communities on the Reservation.

UNITY AND TENSION

The singlewide trailer or mobile home is quite prevalent on the Reservation and similar to the manner that the Indigenous tribes of the Great Plains arranged their camps many years ago, so too do the people here on this local tract of land in this modern day and age. The local community's domestic dwellings were similar in the sense that they were pre-fabricated much like the Teepees of the Plains tribes. However, these structures were not manufactured from wood, sinew, and bison-skin. What these camps did consist of were the domiciles made from the aluminum and steel forms of the singlewide trailer. Interestingly, I found myself drawn to these forms much in the way the Tee Pees had captivated me as a young child. Specifically, I was drawn to the concept of these arrangements of modern domestic structures fused within a constrained space, enveloped by a larger, seemingly more accommodating environment. The correlations between the singlewide trailers and the Tee Pees were numerous and uncanny. Upon first glance these simple, rectangular structures appear weak and easily penetrable. Although the structures sometimes appear weathered and worn, aged and faded—the reality is that these structures exude a quiet, unrelenting strength and security even in their architectural and engineering simplicity. However distant these structures may be from the common notion of what modern society would consider the pinnacle of domestic luxury, stability, and affluence; they nonetheless emanate an unwavering sense of comfort and security even in the direst situational observations. It was quite evident that there was an innate desire to investigate these forms more thoroughly with the intent to

discover something that I could be inspired by which could then be incorporated into my artistic visions. The objective would be to begin combing the reservation boundary, which consists of roughly 82 square miles of expansive Appalachian landscape. Within that objective was the hope that the ideal compositional arrangement would be discovered as an inspiration for the vision I hoped to achieve within my painted works. What I was seeking was that perfect sense of form and compositional arrangement that I felt would be highlighted in at least one of the many sub-communities that existed on the Reservation. In that pursuit of compositional perfection it was my hope that I would begin to see unique visual patterns that would insinuate greater abstractions, as I broke down the arrangements further. The intent was to find these structures in their natural state of existence, in that intriguing arrangement that uttered a forced unity and constrained tension that was so reminiscent of the Teepee camps of long ago. What I found to be utterly amazing was the sheer number of ideal arrangements that I discovered in my searches. The tension, constraint, and unspoken dialogue that I was hoping to find were indeed identified in many different structural arrangements and communities within the reservation land tract.

COLOR AND ARRANGEMENT

Upon exploration of the tribal land in the area I was delighted to discover a plethora of intriguing structural colors, sizes, styles, and organizational arrangements. Some trailers had the incorporation of exterior tones and colors that seemed quite peculiar when one considered what they were. In addition, the colors on these structures have understandably faded over time and wear, further distorting the tone to something reminiscent of pastels. The arrangements seemed so peculiar in their states as I found small groups of mobile homes tightly and awkwardly organized in small areas of land, with no apparent reasoning behind it. Wide-open areas of land and space which one would commonly find conducive to more comfortable domestic arrangements gave way to awkward, confined clusters of these mobile homes. The images drew strong similarities, although abstract, to the Teepee structures of the Plains Indians. The content I was seeking was present within these arrangements. And from that point it became a matter of compiling and organizing this data in a way that was most advantageous for me as I began developing a visual concept for the artistic statements I was aspiring to make.

INFLUENCES

In this conceptual phase I would make correlations to the artists of my particular influence as I began to shape my own individual vision. It would be most appropriate to begin my visions around my greatest influence, artist Fritz Scholder. Fritz Scholder was at the forefront of an artistic revolution in the late sixties and early seventies in which the common, accepted ideas of American Indian art were turned inside out with relentless attacks on the pigeonholing, prejudices, and popular clichés of the subject (Stokes-Sims 22). Attacking the subject with a distinctive fusion of the figurative with the abstract, Scholder found a viable means for reassessing the representational space of Otherness that the word “Indian” had traditionally been designated (Wasserberger 46). What is most critical in my connection to Scholder is the point that, although his images are most definitely visual statements that one could immediately classify as something that is “Indian”, they are also visions that one could never mistake for being cultural in nature. Critics of Scholder often placed into question the sincerity of his “Indian-ness” and many artistic peers like Alfred Young Man and Duane Slick went so far as to say he was not at all pushing the American Indian painting onto a platform of complete artistic freedom as he positioned himself but rather was cashing in on a unique strategic situation in which his culture could be exploited for the sake of individual fame and fortune (Lowe 166). Nevertheless, removing myself from the argument of his validity in the arena of American Indian art, what Scholder did for me personally was allow the emergence of an artistic visual statement that was freed from all of the criteria that was seemingly

attached to all of the art that was considered Indian art. In addition to this connection to the philosophical and conceptual approaches to the visions of Scholder, I am also greatly influenced by the theoretical and stylistic applications of color by the artist. With Scholder's images one may initially see a seemingly simplistic pallet of color. But as you further process compositions like the painting "Super Indian No. 2", you ultimately discover a complexity of layered color, color juxtapositions and compositional genius that was equally mind-jarring and straining to the eye (Scholder, Super Indian No. 2).



Figure 4. Fritz Scholder, *Super Indian No. 2*. 1972. Painting

Non-complimentary colors were slammed into one another in great planes, forcing a composition that often pulsated with tonal movement. Again, there is a

re-emergence of this attraction to the illusion of unity as visualized through forced interaction and compression.

Secondary to Scholder would be Roy Lichtenstein. Less critical are the visual statements of the artist in the realm of the Pop adaptations that provided commentary on the mass consumerism and statements on the American culture. The inspiration in Lichtenstein was his mastery of established balance between the representation of form and abstraction (Gail Stavitsky, Twig Johnson 25). Further, there was an unflinching purity of line work in the art. And what is more attractive is the idea that these works of art with this line purity was in the end, produced by the human hand through the medium of paint. This is ultra critical to me in my creative process and I valued it greatly in the art of Lichtenstein. The appeal to Lichtenstein would have been greatly diminished had his works been primarily composed through screen prints or done solely through mechanical or computer aid. The graphic nature of the art of Lichtenstein is highlighted in the painting "Brushstrokes". The establishment and mastery of this painting process had a profound effect on how I approached my series.



Figure 5. Roy Lichtenstein, *Brushstrokes*. 1967. Painting

The art of Alex Katz had profound effect in my development as an artist as well. The psychological and emotional complexity of Katz's seemingly simplistic works catapulted my efforts to investigate similar methods with the intent to administer like-effects within my visual statements. The figurative components of Katz works are of less importance; what I take note of is his bold abstraction in the manner in which he develops the landscapes within his works. As seen in the work, "Eli", the broad, flat planes of color intersect the various planes of fore, middle, and backgrounds in a rhythm that is flourishing with vibrancy and heightened relationships of color that are seamless and remarkably complex in their build.



Figure 6. Alex Katz, *Eli*. 1963. Painting

Most critical are the larger compositions by Katz that further investigate these expansive blocks of color. Larger canvases mean a heightened effect to this concept, and Katz incorporates a brilliant utilization of this larger façade to further showcase these large color relationships and large intersections that both extend and abruptly crop at varying times across the plane of the canvas. Again, as is the case with Lichtenstein, the purity of line also plays an integral part in these works as well. There is deliberate sparseness to Katz's works, so the necessity for purity and correctness in terms of color, balance, line and perspective are crucial to the success of his visions. Emotionally, Katz's images incorporate coolness and detachment, definite takeaways for exploration within my own works (Schwarz 15).

For further inspiration I had to look no further than within my own specific culture. The Eastern Band of Cherokee had a tradition of basket making that dated back almost ten thousand years and is to this day a critical component of

the culture (Hill, "Honeysuckle" 95). My inspiration is centered on the concept of pattern and symbol within the weaves of the basket form. The patterns are graphic-like in nature and take on a pure form of abstraction as they are integrated into the overall structural design. In the early development of this form of artwork by the Cherokee basket weavers, the patterns were initially absent of signifiers. But as the concept and artistry developed within the culture of basket makers, these patterns began to be conceived with various meanings attached to them. Especially powerful was the integration of the surroundings into the concept of the design. The basket makers were genius in the incorporation of their cultural connections into their work, pushing their craft to a fine-art level of conceptuality. "The patterns were in their soul, in their memory and imaginations, in the mountains, streams and forests, and in those tribal tales and myths" (Hill, "Honeysuckle" 95).



Figure 7. Eva Wolfe, River Cane Basket

Just as the inspiration of the sense of pattern within these baskets play a part in my compositions, so too do the notions of color. The primary tones of color that are ever present in the baskets designs come from the dyes made from the plant resources indigenous the region. Bloodroot, Butternut, Black Walnut and Yellow Root produce tones that vary from reddish-brown to mahogany brown, golden yellow and black (Hill, "Honeysuckle" 197). Consequently, you will see the deliberate incorporation of those tones covertly placed within my compositions.

PROCESS

The process for achieving my artistic visions takes numerous steps from beginning to completion. The foundation of the process begins with the identification of the perfect arrangement of structures within their given space. The next step is to seek these “camps” out within the reservation boundaries and the adjacent communities that surround it. When a structure or group of structures that appeal to me are located, I then take several looks from varying vantage points, essentially trying to see it in the whole, with regard to the environment that envelopes it.



Figure 8. Sean Ross, *Sunset Farms*. Photograph

This part of the process is critical to my art; the relationship of the trailers amongst one another and in their environments can evoke various statements about their community, their owners, and their surroundings by how their final positioning is established. Having said that, it is greatly essential in my

exploration of these sites to find the perfect perspective of these structures. In my initial attempts to document that perfect inspiration, I attempted to capture the structural arrangements through a series of sketches. The idea was to execute these studies through sketches in plein air, with the hopes of finding an unflinching, honesty of form and the relationship to the surroundings. Ultimately, this process proved to place me in precarious predicaments, as it would become quite evident that most people become quite ill at ease when one sketches their abodes from afar. I was never afforded the luxury to sit and conduct a study for an extended period without the owners approaching me with inquiries. The reactions of the owners ranged from utter disregard, to harmless curiosity and even full-blown anger. Oftentimes I was run off of their properties with threats of physical force. As one would assume, this process proved to be inefficient and apparently quite dangerous. So after those initial failed attempts the decision was made to move from trying to sketch these areas to a transition of taking digital photography as the means of capturing these arrangements in their natural environment.

DIGITAL EXPLORATION

Initially there was a struggle with the photographic process due to my resistance to what the camera could ultimately capture in these settings. I was solely looking for the essence of these arrangements through my sketches and through that process I could capture only what I felt was critical to the visions. However, with the camera you get over-stimulated with pixels of data and an infinite amount of visual information, which can sometimes prove to be a hindrance to the vision one tries to create in the final process. The one big advantage of the digital camera was that it allowed me to cover a greater expanse of ground and capture varying angles and perspectives that I would not have been able to cover in the time allotted had I tried to execute sketches. The camera allowed me to record these areas quickly and move on before the owners were ever disturbed.



Figure 9. Sean Ross, *Sunset Farms. Photograph*

With the ease in which these images were captured, the next step of selecting the best structures was made much easier. Many pictures were culled out until the best representations were identified. Moving forward from this point in the process, I was able to revisit my process of line drawings with the intent to construct the best compositional arrangement. This compositional arrangement would eventually be replicated and enlarged through the medium of paint on a large wooden surface in the final step in my process.

PURPOSE OF ABSTRACTION

Within my works there is a need for the removal of components less critical to the overall image. Within this reduction is an exercise of much deliberation, with the onus being the need to make the right determinations as to what stays and what goes within the final composition. Unnecessary external clutter is rampant within the domestic areas I captured on the digital camera, and the majority of this clutter would only cause distraction if left in the final image. Again, for my artistic vision I am seeking the essence of the structures and their atmospheric surroundings solely. Anything in addition to this begins to shift this vision into something that could potentially deliver commentary that could be construed as being about race, poverty, desperation, struggle, or suffering. The visual statement I am trying to deliver does not speak to those issues even though those components were evident in some of the situations I observed and recorded. So the elements that are of no importance are simply disregarded and the more critical pieces all make it into a series of sketches.

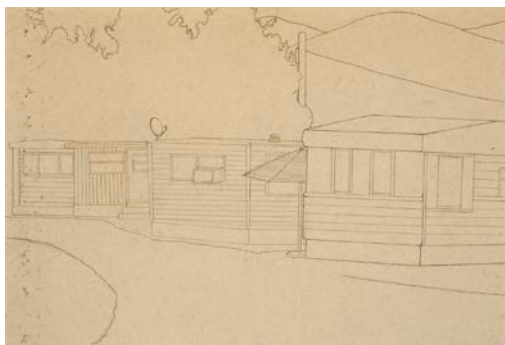


Figure 10 and 11. Sean Ross, Structure Studies #1 and #2. Illustration

I explore the process of multiple repeated sketches as a way of further streamlining the process of incorporation of things deemed most critical. I found that by doing repeated rough studies, it allows me to create a sense of muscle memory in the execution of the drawings as well as begin to simplify the things within the composition. Another thing this repetition of studies allows is for a progression onto a path that leads to the misalignment and slight distortion of the structures I recreate. It is a must that an adequate understanding of perspective is established before I even begin to construct my compositions. However, this is not to execute a stronger visual representation of perspective, but to deliver a stronger point of deviation from the accuracy of perspective. A basis of exactness is needed before the composition can be pushed and augmented into something else entirely. The true test is forcing the eye to lead the hand into a direction of distortion. I find that it is quite difficult to purposely misalign my compositions. The eye pushes, begs, for a sense of unity, balance, and perspective order. It takes many rounds of studies to establish the ultimate imbalance that is sought after. Slightly twisted, shifted, and skewed, the trailers in my compositions exude a sense of awkwardness. This is completely the intent. The trick is to deliver this effect without making the composition appear too misshapen or artificial. The imbalance must feel feasible to communicate what I am seeing in the actual areas I am observing. Referring back to Alex Katz, how I ultimately crop the elements in the composition plays a critical role in the successful delivery of the composition.



Figure 12. Sean Ross, *Village #1*. Acrylic Painting on Canvas

The way the structures protrude and recede in the suggested space delivers desirable effects as well. Although the structures in the visions I create are a series of simple lines intersecting flat planes of color, the arrangements they communicate suggest varying degrees of depth. The intent is never to create a feeling of three-dimensionality, but rather to insinuate a sense of compression and tension amongst the varying components within the visual statement. The communication of a believable distorted perspective, accompanied by a feeling of compression and tension with the visual accoutrement of flatness and simplicity of line is no small feat. The attempt of this concept is something that has been explored for over a year and a half to properly execute. Considering my influences, there is a desire for exactness and purity of line, an understanding of color relationships, an incorporation of pattern

to the point of abstraction, and an incorporation of larger dimension to push these points to a much greater effect.



Figure 13. Sean Ross, *Village #2*. Acrylic Painting on Canvas

When the process transfers from a study to a painting, many other things need to be considered. Size, for instance, is critical to the image I try to create. In the recent past there have been art works that I have created that have fallen short of what I would deem a success due to the diminutive stature of the canvas they were composed on. These compositions need great areas of space in which to sit upon. The geometry, line work, inter-connected formations, and wide planes of color all need larger spaces to exist to effectively work in the manner that I feel that they should. The structures that were built for my painted visual statements for my thesis are all larger in size than what I had currently used. The pieces average 6 feet in height and range from 7 to 8 feet in width, with a depth

of over 11 inches. This increase in volume allows the viewer the option of either casually observing the paintings from afar or walking up on the pieces to become a participant in the composition and envelopment of the space by the structures that reside within it. As I have said before, there is no interest in an explosion of three-dimensions; it is a converse to that in which I am looking for. I am seeking an implosion of sorts, a way to elude this great sense of forced compression and strained misalignment. The viewer when engaged should feel a sense of this upon their undivided observations.



Figure 14. Sean Ross, *Village #3*. Acrylic Painting on Canvas

In addition to the size of the structure that the composition is incorporated onto, much consideration must also be made in regards to the color that is used for the imagery. The concept of color needs to be pushed for a greater

artistic/conceptual effect due to the flatness of the color planes. You will not see shading, or blended tones that incorporate unnecessary gradations within these compositions. The color can be pushed within the imagery without an overexertion of rendering. I do, however, seek color relationships that are unconventional. Colors that covertly contrast one another have great appeal to me. Like the structures they cover, I once again investigate the concept of tension and compression. This effect should not be pushed to the degree of exaggeration, though, for that exaggeration would ultimately be distracting to the composition. That objective creates a rather precipitous line—the capacity to create and extend color for varying effect within the work without making it of detriment to the overall concept of the piece. There are a limited number of tones within each composition, coupled with a limited number of forms and objects. Having said that, the appropriate execution of color is a critical component of the vision. Any arrangement of color that is even slightly amiss creates an unwanted effect within the imagery and potentially taints the whole composition.



Figure 15. Sean Ross, *Village #4*. Acrylic Painting on Canvas

The medium chosen makes direct correlations to the subject content as well. I made a decision to use common, flat latex house paint after a period of exploration in materials. Aside from the conceptual connections to the subject and the statements about a mass commercial, prefabrication of units and unit materials, it also became evident that the transition to this paint was the most efficient means of delivering a flatness of plane that I was wishing to achieve. The paint had a density, a viscosity to it that allowed me to use it in a manner that was almost sculptural in how it was overlaid onto other forms and colors. The paint has a quicker drying time than acrylic, which meant color had to be applied quickly and evenly to deliver an effect of flatness to the works.

PATTERN

Pattern also plays a key part in the makeup of my visual statements. Foundations of repetition within lines, colors, and forms create great intrigue for me. Like the great basket makers of the Cherokee, I identify these things in natural or man-made environments whenever I am out scouting my subjects. With those longstanding traditions in basket making the desire to seek out pattern relationships for the incorporation into my visual statements makes total sense. The patterns executed in my compositions are covert nods to the cultural traditions in art making. A sense of pattern is quite apparent within my works but it only quietly alludes to any sort of Native American sensibility.

CLOSURE

The three paintings that I have created for the visual component to my thesis speak to me. As an artist I do not always have clear reasoning in the creative journeys I take. There is much appeal in the thought that sometimes an avenue for questions is not allotted, but solely a call to action. The strength of the inspirations provides me with the drive for the works that I envision to be made with no regard to the reaction. I cannot always clarify the reasoning behind their inspiration; it can sometimes come from outside our periphery. In regards to the specific works of my thesis it appears that there is an affinity for a sense of community that I see within these clusters of dwellings. In all instances there seems to be a congregation that feels instinctual, natural and removed from any notion of a pre-planned occurrence. This is critical because my path of research led me to become acquainted with the phenomena of several questionable pre-planned communities that were, in my opinion, very flawed. It would be accurate to proclaim that these attempts at large, Planned Suburban Utopian societies in the past and present times provided clarity for me because it allowed for the ability to draw distinctions to what these clusters around the reservation boundaries ultimately were not. The whole idea of concepts like the US postwar “Levittowns” of William Levitt in Pennsylvania and New York in the 1950’s became something that I used as a counterpoint to the pieces I developed for my show (LIFE 91). The idea of a mass produced, prefabricated suburb is something that I find intriguing and frightening all at the same time. In examples like Levittown and more recently, Celebration in Florida; you see the idea of a pre-

planned strategy of mass control and conformity developed under the guise of convenience, comfort, protection and efficiency. The mobile home clusters that I have become so drawn to appear less congruent to the prefabricated, commercial, communities mentioned above. In these instances the migration by the homeowners, congregating tightly into compact communities, seems less an effect of control, but more of an act of freedom. The tension and constraint within the mobile home communities evoke a level of knowing, an acceptance and understanding of these components. The feeling of congestion, tension and awkwardness when self-imposed, always feels more malleable than when it is imposed onto us by outsiders. As an artist, when I observe these communities and these clusters of homes I realize that these forms speak to me literally and metaphorically. The structures and their compositional arrangements feel loaded with conceptual possibilities in the field of art. In my thesis works I have explored through painting at least one avenue of this concept. It is uncertain what the future will hold for me with this series and concept. It is my thought that I will begin to explore other avenues within the art mediums, all with the intent of pushing this concept even further. But for now it was important to incorporate my love of painting with this concept I am so drawn to.

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